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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

MACROECONOMIC POLICY QUESTIONS

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION

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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Letter dated 11 October 1994 from the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On behalf of the Group of the Least Developed Countries, I have the honour to forward to you the Declaration adopted by the Ministerial Meeting of the Least Developed Countries at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 4 October 1994 (see annex).

I should be grateful if arrangements could be made for the Declaration to be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda items 12, 87, 88, 89, 92, 95, 97 and 158.

(Signed) Reaz RAHMAN
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Declaration of the Ministerial Meeting of the Least Developed Countries adopted in New York, on 4 October 1994

We, the Ministers of the least developed countries (LDCs) meeting in New York during the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly pursuant to the decision of the Dhaka Declaration of February 1990.

Recalling with satisfaction the commemoration in 1994 of the thirtieth anniversary of the Group of 77, of which the LDCs are an integral part; noting the efforts of the Group during the last three decades to keep development issues alive and promote the interests of the developing countries; appreciating the Group's support to LDCs that are trying to resolve their development problems; confident that the Group of 77 would continue to support the cause of LDCs in the coming years in a concerted fashion with the aim of achieving our common goals.

Recalling the annual Ministerial consultations of 1993 and the declaration adopted at that meeting.

Having assessed progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the least developed countries for the 1990s and bearing in mind the present difficult economic situation in the LDCs, solemnly declare the following:

1. We are deeply concerned at the slow economic growth in LDCs. We are particularly alarmed by the fact that the number of people living in absolute poverty in our countries continues to grow. The problems of low economic growth, stagnating resource flows, the meagre amount of foreign direct investment, deteriorating terms of trade, the decrease in export earnings, the increasing debt burden, high unemployment rates and environmental degradation, etc., continue to hamper our development efforts. The situation is further aggravated when LDCs suffer from periodic natural disasters, political instability and war and are afflicted by problems of massive numbers of refugees and displaced persons. Given the increasing interdependence and globalization of the world economy, the deteriorating economic situation of LDCs should constitute a major concern for all the members of the international community.

2. We note with serious concern that only limited progress has so far been achieved in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s adopted by the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Paris from 3 to 14 September 1990. While LDCs are doing their best to achieve the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action, the international community has lagged behind in terms of implementing their commitments. Little progress has so far been made to fulfil the official development assistance targets agreed in the Programme of Action. We urge our development partners to fully implement their commitments in all areas as a matter of urgency and provide new and additional resources in view of the increase in the number of LDCs in recent years.

3. We note with deep concern that the external debt burden continues to remain exceptionally heavy for LDCs. At the end of 1992, their total debt stock represented 60 per cent of their combined gross domestic product. We call for specific new initiatives to reduce the external debt of LDCs to a level that would permit the revival of economic and social development. To achieve this, there should be a full cancellation of all bilateral official debt and substantial reduction of debt stock and debt service burden owed to multilateral financial institutions and commercial creditors. In this regard, we welcome the outcome of the Ministerial Meeting of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries on Debt and Development held at Jakarta in August 1994 and consider that the recommendations endorsed at the meeting provide a good basis for debt resolution, particularly of LDCs and would greatly contribute towards the evolution of a development-oriented and comprehensive debt strategy. We appeal that the proposed principles as set out in the report of the meeting should be favourably considered during the deliberations on debt crisis at the forty-ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

4. We note with profound disquiet the continued erosion of the trading opportunities of LDCs in recent years. We are particularly concerned to learn that LDCs as a whole will be negatively affected by the agreements of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. In particular, LDCs will suffer erosion of preferential treatment on most of their important exports to the major markets implying a loss in export market shares and export earnings. In addition, the net food importing LDCs are likely to face higher food import bills, arising from agricultural sector trade liberalization. There is an urgent need for external support to mitigate the adverse consequences arising from the Uruguay Round agreements on LDCs, particularly through substantially enhanced trade preferences as well as compensatory financing measures. We consider environmental, labour and other conditionalities as protectionist measures and urge the international community not to apply such or any other measures that will either stop production or make exports from LDCs inaccessible to the world market. We strongly feel that a separate LDC unit should be established at the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)/World Trade Organization secretariat with a view to monitoring the implementation of special provisions for LDCs contained in the Uruguay Round agreements. We urge that the issue of establishing such a unit in GATT/World Trade Organization should be given favourable and priority consideration. To this end, we entrust Bangladesh, Benin and the Sudan to follow up the implementation of this recommendation as appropriate.

5. We strongly feel that a supportive international environment is crucial to ensure sustained economic growth and development of LDCs. While LDCs themselves are trying hard to eradicate poverty and increase the living standards of their population, resource and other constraints are creating serious obstacles to their efforts. A growing number of LDCs have embarked on wide-ranging and far-reaching socio-economic reforms in recent years. The pace and scope of these reforms, however, contrast sharply with the meagre results achieved so far. In particular, despite considerable success in securing short-term macroeconomic stability, the reforms appear to have neither removed structural constraints facing the economy nor improved supply capacity.

6. Structural adjustment policies have not always achieved the desired objectives of improvement in the welfare of the population and augmentation of the share of the poor in the benefits of economic development. We call upon the Bretton Woods institutions to take into account the social concerns of the participating countries in the design and implementation of its structural adjustment programmes for LDCs. Such policies should be flexible for application and supported by adequate resources. We feel that the reform and structural adjustment measures should be designed and implemented taking fully into account the special needs of the vulnerable sections of the society.

7. We recognize that it is the responsibility of the respective Governments to formulate development policies, set priorities, take reform measures and implement them. Economic reform measures should reflect the development imperatives and priorities of LDCs to produce desired results. Reform measures should be designed taking into account the specific needs, level of development and structural characteristics of each country.

8. We emphasize that national capacity-building of LDCs should be an area of special attention. We urge our development partners to provide financial and technical support in concessional terms to assist LDCs in their efforts at national capacity-building so that their absorptive capacity is enhanced. Our economies are facing great difficulties because of weak infrastructures which hamper our efforts towards overall socio-economic development. This also creates obstacles to attract direct foreign investment and diversify our economies. We, therefore, urge the international community to assist LDCs in building their infrastructure which will help them come out of the present economic decline and stagnation.

9. The mid-term global review is of particular significance to LDCs in view of its most important task of setting out new and corrective policies and measures, particularly substantially strengthened external support to LDCs in all areas, so as to ensure a timely and full implementation of the Programme of Action during the remainder of the decade. We, therefore, stress the need for adequate and thorough preparation for this event.

10. We welcome the decisions of the General Assembly contained in resolution 48/171 of 21 December 1993, to convene a high-level intergovernmental meeting in 1995 to conduct the mid-term global review of progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s. We would like to underscore that the participation at the high-level review meeting should be at the ministerial level. We entrust the Chairman of the Ministerial Meeting of LDCs (Bangladesh) to make a broader approach with our development partners to send ministerial-level delegations at the high-level mid-term review meeting to ensure a successful outcome of the meeting and its full and timely implementation.

11. We welcome the decision of the spring 1994 session of the Trade and Development Board in regard to the preparations for the mid-term global review meeting and call upon the Secretary-General to make every possible effort to obtain sufficient extrabudgetary resources for the full and effective participation of LDCs in the preparatory meetings of the review meeting.

12. We take note of the steps taken by the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in preparing for the mid-term global review, including the planned sectoral and expert group meetings. We urge all donors and relevant United Nations organizations, particularly the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to provide the requisite support to these activities. The UNCTAD secretariat should be fully equipped with adequate resources and capacity to undertake a comprehensive preparation for the mid-term global review, to ensure an effective follow-up of its outcome, to carry out more fully its country-level work, and to follow-up the conclusions relating to LDCs adopted at major United Nations conferences.

13. The environmental challenges and vulnerabilities confronted by LDCs needed special attention by the international community. The situation and needs of LDCs were given special priority in Agenda 21 which needs to be made operational without further delay. We urge the development partners to provide LDCs with additional resources, both in terms of concessional financing and access to environmentally sound technology to enhance the capacity of LDCs to protect the environment. Given the fact that many of the LDCs are facing serious consequences arising from desertification and drought, we welcome the adoption by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa in Paris in June 1994. Priority attention should be given to activities in favour of LDCs that are facing the threat of desertification. We request all countries to sign the Convention and ratify it so that it can enter into force at the earliest.

14. Nowhere in the world today are social conditions more desperate and deserve more urgent attention than in LDCs. In an increasing number of LDCs, unabated decline in per capital real income, aggravating poverty and deprivation are threatening social stability. The forthcoming World Summit for Social Development provides an important forum for the international community to focus on the social and development concerns of LDCs, particularly the full integration of women in development. We call upon the international community to pay particular attention to the socio-economic development challenges facing LDCs and reflect it adequately in the works and outcome of the Summit.

15. We reiterate our anxiety over the present demographic trends in LDCs. Rapid population growth has serious and far-reaching implications for their economic growth and social well-being. Moreover, population growth has also important linkages with employment, poverty and environment. In this context, we call upon the international community to implement fully the commitments undertaken at the International Conference on Population and Development to assist the population and development activities of LDCs.

16. The situation of women in LDCs and the need to integrate them further in the development process deserve the urgent attention of the international community. It may be noted that the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries in the 1990s already provides broad indications of actions aimed at mobilization of women as agents and beneficiaries of development. We would like to underscore that the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held at Beijing in 1995, should accord particular importance to the problems and policy options for enhancing the developmental role of women in LDCs and ensuring a better quality

of life for them. We appreciate the efforts of the UNCTAD secretariat for planning to organize an expert group meeting on women in development in LDCs, and hope that this meeting will make substantive contribution to the mid-term global review as well as to the Beijing Conference. We hope that the issue of the empowerment of women will receive priority attention in the forthcoming social summit.

17. We welcome the timely initiative for an agenda for development. It provides us a historic opportunity to address the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment of the developing countries in a comprehensive manner. We strongly feel that the critical economic situation and special needs of LDCs should be highlighted in the agenda for development. We urge the Secretary-General to outline concrete measures for the socio-economic development of LDCs in his final recommendations for the agenda for development to be submitted at the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly. We are confident that the revised report of the Secretary-General on an agenda for development will adequately incorporate the views expressed in the Ministerial Statement of the Group of 77 on an agenda for development, the summary of the President of the General Assembly of the world hearings on the agenda for development and the summary of the President of the Economic and Social Council of the high-level segment.

18. We call upon the international community, in a true spirit of partnership and cooperation, to renew its commitment to mobilize new and additional resources for the overall socio-economic development of LDCs.